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C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (CHANGED TEXT)

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DEPT FOR EUR/NCE - WILLIAM SILKWORTH

NSC FOR DAMON WILSON

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TAGS: PGOV PREL SOCI MOPS MARR IZ SR RO

SUBJECT: PRESIDENT BASESCU'S COMMENTS BEFORE LEAVING
BUCHAREST FOR WASHINGTON

Classified By: CDA Rodger Garner, Reasons: 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (SBU) Summary. President Traian Basescu reaffirmed on July 26 Romania's commitment to keep its troops in Iraq until they are replaced by the Iraqi army. This declaration was made as the president left the Bucharest airport for his official U.S. visit. On Kosovo, however, he struck a discordant tone following his reception of Serbian President Tadic in Bucharest, advocating for Kosovo's autonomy within Serbian borders. During the visit, Basescu will meet President Bush, Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld, members of the U.S. Congress, representatives of the World Bank and members of the Romanian Diaspora. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) Before departing Bucharest for his second official visit to the U.S., President Traian Basescu stated to the press on July 26 that Romania would respect its commitments in Iraq. Basescu underscored that "a country that is determined to fulfill its commitments taken in 2003 cannot announce a date at which its troops will be withdrawn." According to Basescu, such an announcement would only benefit the terrorist groups in Iraq. He said Romania would make "a mistake" if, "in a difficult moment," it would leave its allies without its support. He insisted that Romania would keep its troops in Iraq until the Iraqi national army would be able to take over the responsibilities carried out by the Romanians. Basescu concluded that a timetable for the troops, withdrawal should only be determined by the "realities on the ground."

¶3. (SBU) President Basescu also outlined in front of the journalists at the airport what he viewed as the main issues to be addressed in the bilateral meeting with President Bush. Basescu said he would discuss with the U.S. President the implementation of the Bilateral Defense Cooperation Agreement, which will allow for the joint use by U.S. troops of Romanian military facilities, and other ways to strengthen the Romanian-U.S. strategic partnership.

¶4. (SBU) Basescu mentioned Black Sea and Western Balkans issues as also on the bilateral agenda. Concerning Kosovo, Basescu emphasized that Romania, "has a slightly different position" than the solution adopted by the Contact Group (made up of U.S., Great Britain, France, and Russia) and favors a solution that would allow autonomy for Kosovo, but keep the borders of the Serbian state intact. He stated regarding Kosovo, "We plead for the acknowledgment of the state borders and for finding solutions of autonomy inside the borders of the Serbian state." Basescu hosted Serbian

President Boris Tadic in Bucharest the prior day.

¶ 15. (SBU) Basescu also announced that, during his meetings with representative of the US Congress, he would request Members of Congress expedite the legal procedures that would lead to visa waivers for Romanians. He acknowledged, however, that this process might take a long time. During his visit to the U.S., the press reported that the Romanian president would also meet with the World Bank to discuss plans for financing major development projects in Romania; and with representatives of the Romanian community living in the U.S.

¶ 16. (C) Comment: Basescu's departure received widespread press play, highlighting the importance both he and his team ascribe to the visit. His remarks on Kosovo indicate a divergence from what he and his advisors had raised in recent discussions with USG interlocutors, in which the Romanians expressed concerns but pledged to support the U.S. position on Kosovo's final status. No doubt Basescu will seek to discuss his meeting with Tadic while in Washington, as well as explain the intention of his departing comments. End Comment.

GARNER